THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

BENGALURU • THURSDAY • MAY 07, 2026 • ₹9.00 • PAGES 22 • LATE CITY EDITION

DAY 68 | WAR WATCH

IRAN OPERATION OVER: RUBIO

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said that Operation Epic Fury, which began on Feb 28 against Iran, has ended. He claimed the mission has achieved its objectives | P14

"The operation is over, as the president notified Congress. We're done with that stage of it," Rubio told reporters at the White House

According to CNN, US and Iran are moving closer to an agreement on a one-page memo to end the war and begin nuclear negotiations

Meanwhile, US President Donald Trump said he is pausing Project Freedom, the military operation to escort stranded ships out of Hormuz

In his typical style, Trump also issued a fresh warning to Iran, saying the "bombing starts" again if a deal is not reached

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DMK-AIADMK rumours may rain on Vijay's parade

Swearing-in ceremony may be put off as governor yet to invite TVK to form govt even as buzz emerges of Dravidian majors mulling a team-up

T MURUGANANDHAM @ Chennai

THE swearing-in ceremony of TVK chief Vijay, initially scheduled for Thursday, may be delayed even as strong rumours gathered speed of arch-rivals DMK and AIADMK discussing a partnership along with their allies to form a government.

It is unclear how such an alliance would work with the AIADMK's ally PMK and its rival VCK, allied to DMK, being in the mix. The DMK (59 seats) and AIADMK (47) together have 106 seats, falling short of a simple majority by 12. The IUML, CPI, CPM and VCK from the DMK front have two seats each and DMDK has one, while the PMK from the AIADMK alliance has four. If such an alliance comes to fruition, AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami may assume the chief ministerial post with DMK's support, as part of a larger plan that may extend up to the 2029 Lok Sabha elections, sources indicated.

However, leaders from both Dravidian majors officially denied such a development to *TNIE*. DMK MP Kalanidhi Veeraswamy, in a late night X post, said, "The DMK has decided to function as an effective opposition despite Congress' betrayal (and perhaps other alliance parties). The ADMK (sic) is pushing BJP to stop TVK forming the government. That is disrespecting people's mandate. Hope democracy prevails."

The rumour mill started churning late on Wednesday, after the Congress formally announced its support to the TVK to form a government, stating that the alliance will continue till the 2029 polls. Vijay subsequently met with Tamil Nadu Governor Rajendra Arlekar and staked his claim to form a government as the legislative party leader of the single largest party in the House.

It is customary for Lok Bhavan to issue an invitation within an hour of the leader staking claim to form a government and prove his majority on the floor of the state Assembly within a specified time frame. However, as of going to press on Wednesday night, the governor had yet to issue such an invitation. P7,11

TVK president Vijay with TN Governor Rajendra Arlekar at the Lok Bhavan in Chennai on Wednesday | PTI

Cong severs decade-long ties with DMK

Chennai: The Congress, in a statement issued by AICC Tamil Nadu in-charge Girish Chodankar on Wednesday, formally severed its decade-long alliance with the DMK-led Secular Progressive Alliance and extended its full support to Vijay's Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam to form the government in the state | P11

EPS as CM in DMK-AIADMK combine?

According to AIADMK sources, in case of a DMK-AIADMK tie-up, party general secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami may assume the chief ministerial post with DMK's support, as part of a larger plan that may extend up to the 2029 Lok Sabha elections. It is unclear how this would work with both the PMK and VCK in the mix

No bilaterals with Pak, but multi-nation events OK

CHENNAI: In a major development, India put out a formal sports policy regarding India's participation or hosting of international events. Though certain provisions were part of an unsigned document on the sports ministry website in August 2025, this time the signed policy outlined India's approach involving Pakistan. India and Pakistan will not play in bilateral series but when it comes to international events involving multiple nations, they are free to compete in India or abroad.

The circular dated May 5, 2026, has said that India's policy of not playing Pakistan in bilateral events will continue. "India's approach to sports events involving Pakistan reflects its overall policy in dealing with that country," said the office memorandum. *ENS*

CM race heats up, Chennithala meets Cong brass

PREETHA NAIR @ New Delhi

AS the race for the Kerala CM post intensifies, senior Congress leader **Ramesh Chennithala** met Rahul Gandhi and Mallikarjun Kharge in Delhi on Wednesday to present his case for the position, sources said.

Following the Congress-led UDF's victory in the assembly elections, the contest for the CM post has narrowed to three leaders: V D Satheesan, K C Venugopal, and Chennithala.

AICC observers Mukul Wasnik and Ajay Maken are expected to meet the newly elected MLAs individually on Thursday.

According to sources, Chennithala informed the leadership that he was overlooked for the post of Leader of Opposition in 2021, despite having the backing of a majority of Congress MLAs. He also projected his seniority and vast administrative experience. The meeting was also attended by Venugopal, said sources.

The high command is expected to make a final call once the observers submit their report. However, sources indicated that Venugopal has emerged as the frontrunner for the CM post, while Satheesan has been projected as the people's choice.

Sources said Venugopal told the leadership voters did not back the the UDF on the basis of projecting any one individual as CM. He reportedly argued that each elected representative was chosen based on individual influence, positions, and other relevant factors. P7

Suvendu Adhikari's PA shot dead in West Bengal

SUBHENDU MAITI @ Kolkata

In a major escalation of post-poll violence in West Bengal, a close aide of BJP's prime contender for chief ministership, Suvendu Adhikari, was shot dead on Wednesday night at Madhyagram in North 24 Parganas district.

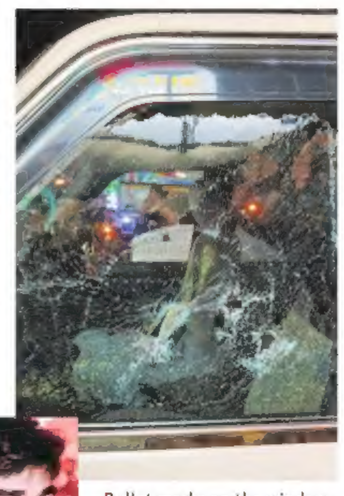
According to locals, the assailants randomly sprayed bullets on Chandranath Rath, personal assistant of Adhikari, and his driver when their car was on the National Highway.

Both sustained severe injuries and were rushed to a local hospital where Rath was declared dead. The condition of the driver is critical. Adhikari later visited the hospital. He was not in the car that was attacked.

The attackers are said to have followed Rath's car, intercepted it, shot him through the rolled-up window from the opposite side and fled. He was in the front seat next to the driver.

The incident occurred at Chowmatha at Maddhyamgram, hardly 3 km from Kolkata airport. With tension building up in Maddhyamgram, a massive deployment of police forces was ordered. Police are verifying local CCTV footage to identify the culprits.

Earlier in the day, Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar ordered the arrest of all those involved the post-poll violence. The order came hours after two paramilitary personnel and an equal number of policemen, including the officer in-charge of Nazat police station, B P Purkayastha, and a woman constable, were shot at during a clash in the Sandeshkhali area.



Bullet marks on the window of a car Chandranath Rath (inset) was travelling in. Rath was Suvendu Adhikari's personal assistant | PTI

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